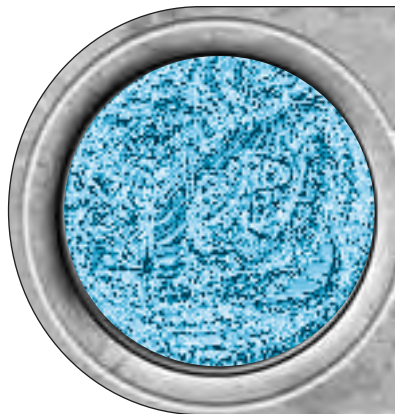




LIVING IN THE HERE AND NOW: TOLERANCE

Liberty for All?

March 26, 2011

1 PREPARING

A. THE SOURCE

Acts 17:16-34 • (The story of Paul's visit to Athens is an interesting one within the context of a study of pluralism.)

John 10:16 (NIV) • "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd."

Isaiah 56:6, 7 (NIV) • "And foreigners who bind themselves to the Lord to serve him, to love the name of the Lord, and to worship him, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant—these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations."

"In the world it is called Tolerance, but in hell it is called Despair, the sin that believes in nothing, cares for nothing, seeks to know nothing, interferes with nothing, enjoys nothing, hates nothing, finds purpose in nothing, lives for nothing, and remains alive because there is nothing for which it will die."—*Dorothy Sayer (1893-1967), British author and scholar.*

(See additional passages in student material.)

B. WHAT'S TO BE SAID ABOUT "TOLERANCE"

Words like "pluralism" and "tolerance" may be unfamiliar to earliteens, but the concepts behind them are hot topics in today's world. We no longer live in a society where Christian beliefs and values are taken as the "norm" for everyone. Today's teens grow up in a world where non-Christian religions or no religion at all are considered just as valid in the popular culture as Christianity. How does a Christian teen approach this pluralistic world? Youth hear voices urging them to accept and embrace everyone and everyone's philosophy as equally valid. They may hear other voices urging them to "take a firm stand" and fearlessly point out where others are wrong—even to the point of being judgmental.

As you explore this complex topic with teens, help them see the importance of having a firm basis for their own beliefs as they are exposed to the beliefs of others. Stress the importance of separating "tolerance" from "acceptance or agreement": they can love others and treat their beliefs with respect without needing to agree with those beliefs or lifestyles. Likewise, they'll need to learn how to disagree without being harsh, critical, or unloving.

C. WHERE WE'RE GOING WITH "TOLERANCE"

As a result of this lesson we would like the students to be able to:

1. Express a solid basis for their own belief in Jesus.
2. Respect the beliefs of others even when they differ.
3. Discuss the difference between tolerating others' beliefs and accepting/agreeing with them.

D. MATERIALS NEEDED

Beginning • (Activity A) chalkboard or flipchart, chalk or markers; (Activity B) glass of water, food coloring, dropper.

Connecting • Bibles, student lessons.

2 BRIDGING

A. WHERE WE'VE BEEN BEFORE

Allow 10 minutes as students are arriving to:

1. Ask them which verse they chose to learn from Wednesday's portion of their lesson. Give them opportunity to say their verses from memory.
2. Give the students opportunity to "quote" themselves, using what they wrote in the Monday portion of their lesson. Be sure to debrief them about any quotations that might not reflect the Christian life accurately. However, quotations of this nature do not occur in every lesson.
3. Review responses that they and others made to the scenario that was posed on Sunday. Discuss the variety of responses, ending with thoughts from last week's What's to Be Said About . . . in the teacher lesson.

If you have a very large group, have adults available to process this section with smaller groups of students.

B. OTHER SABBATH SCHOOL COMPONENTS

>> Song service

- >> Mission emphasis (find a link for *Adventist Mission for Youth and Adult* at www.realtimefaith.net)
- >> Service project reports

3 BEGINNING

NOTE TO TEACHER: Put together your own program with options from the categories below—Beginning, Connecting, Applying, and Closing. Please keep in mind, however, that the students need to have an opportunity to be interactive (participate actively *and* with one another) and to study from the Word. At some point you should distribute or call their attention to their student lesson for this week.

A. BEGINNING ACTIVITY

Get ready • Have a flipchart, chalkboard, or whiteboard available to write down suggestions as students brainstorm them.

Get set • Ask students to list as many different religions or beliefs as they can—any they have ever heard of. Write the list up front while they brainstorm.

Go • When the list is complete, go through it with the students. **Ask:** **How many of these religious beliefs are actually practiced by people you personally know?** Check those off on the list. For the others on the list, **ask:** **Where did you hear about these beliefs?** (TV, books, magazines, etc).

Debriefing • **Ask:** **Do you think Christian teens your age are exposed to more different kinds of beliefs than your parents or grandparents were? Why might this be?** (More people moving to different parts of the world and sharing beliefs; more media coverage; more people in my part of the world adopting religious beliefs from other parts of the world; more new religions being invented.) **How does exposure to all these other beliefs affect**

your faith in Seventh-day Adventist Christianity? How do you react when you meet someone whose religious beliefs are very different from yours? (Try to share my faith with them; avoid talking about religion at all; become interested and try to learn from each other, etc.)

B. BEGINNING ACTIVITY

Get ready • Prepare a large, clear glass of water and a dropper with food coloring in it. For a large class, divide into groups and give each group a glass of water and some food coloring.

Get set • Add a single drop of food coloring to the water and watch closely as it enters the water.

Go • Observe how the food coloring remains separate from the water for a time and then begins to spread. Show how you can speed up the process of its permeating throughout the water by shaking the glass. If a small amount is added, the whole glass of water will eventually become faintly colored. See what happens to the color if you add several more drops of food coloring.

Debriefing • Ask: How easy is it for someone to stay “separate” and unique from others around them? What kinds of things can “shake” the mix to make people blend in more quickly? How is our society changed by new people, new ideas, new religions? Is it better to stay separate or to “mix in”? Is there a way to “mix” with others and still keep your beliefs separate and distinct?

C. BEGINNING ILLUSTRATION

In your own words, tell the following story:

Brad grew up in a small church in a small town. Everyone he knew pretty much agreed about the important things: right and wrong, God and Satan, heaven and hell. Then Brad’s parents move to a larger city so Brad’s dad can take a new job. In Brad’s new junior high school, he meets kids from all over the world. One day

Brad and some friends start talking about what they believe. One of his new friends is a Muslim who says, “You pray to God, I pray to Allah. Same God, different names. No big deal.” Another friend says, “I don’t believe there’s a God at all, but I can still be a good person and live a good life.” A girl in Brad’s class says, “I’m a witch. I believe in worshiping the spirits of nature and the Goddess. Instead of praying for good things to happen, I work spells. What’s the difference?” When Brad says, “I believe Jesus died for our sins and believing in Him is the only way to be saved,” his friends say, “That’s just your opinion. It’s OK for you, but you have no right to say it’s true for the rest of us. You have to accept our different beliefs just like we accept yours.”

Debriefing • Ask: How should Brad relate to his new friends and their different beliefs? Should he try to show them that they need Jesus, or just forget about it? Is he being intolerant if he disagrees with them? How can you accept people without accepting their beliefs—or can you?

4 CONNECTING

A. CONNECTING TO THE KINGDOM

If your class is large (20 people or more), divide into seven small groups and assign each group one of the Bible verses from Wednesday’s portion of the student lesson. (For a smaller class, break into three or four groups and pick one of the verses to assign to each group.) **Say:** Pretend that you are Seventh-day Adventist Christians living in the world you live in today, believing as you do, surrounded by people with all kinds of different beliefs—with one important difference. You have been told that the Bible verse in front of you is the most important one in the whole Bible and it must guide you in all your dealings with people outside the church. Based on

this text alone, decide how your church will relate to people with different beliefs. What will your outreach program be? How will you react when confronted with different beliefs?

Allow groups a few minutes to read their texts and discuss. Then ask each group to report back. Point out some of the differences: for example, a group that read only **Matthew 28** would have a very active evangelism program, while a group that read only **Romans 12:18** might not want to do anything that would stir up controversy. Point out the importance of having a balanced approach that takes the whole Bible into consideration. Based on all of these Bible texts, how should Christians approach those others in their world? Is it possible to combine evangelism with tolerance?

B. CONNECTING TO THE LESSON ILLUSTRATION

Ask someone beforehand to read or tell the story from Sabbath's portion of the lesson.

Compare the two situations. **Ask: Was India Tracy being persecuted for her faith? Were the Eritrean students being persecuted for theirs? What are the differences between the two scenarios? What are the similarities? Seventh-day Adventists have always been very strongly in favor of religious freedom. Sometimes, however, we're eager to have that freedom of religion for ourselves but not so eager to give it to those who disagree with us. Ask: Do we really believe everybody should have the right to worship as they please? Should any limits or boundaries be placed on that?** (e.g. What about a group that practices ritual child abuse, as some cults do?) **How do we handle sharing Jesus with the world while at the same time respecting other people's beliefs?**

C. CONNECTING TO LIFE

Pose the following scenario:

Your church is holding prophecy seminars, and you have several invitations to give to your

friends. You give one to a friend after school on the bus, saying, "This is something my church is doing, if you're interested." She looks at it, crumples it up and says, "I really hate it when you give me stuff like this and bug me about coming to church with you. I'm not a Christian and I don't even believe in God. Why can't you accept me as I am instead of trying to convert me? What I hate about Christians is the way they're so intolerant of other people's beliefs."

Shocked by this outburst and really wishing you had never given her the invitation to the seminar, you try to think of a reply. What do you say?

5 APPLYING

A. APPLICATION ACTIVITY

Imagine your community is holding a "Diversity Day" in which members of different religious groups will have the opportunity to put on displays that illustrate their beliefs and their style of worship. The idea is that everyone will have a chance to wander around, visit different displays, and experience someone else's point of view. The program will include representatives of many different Christian churches as well as Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Wiccans, people who practice Native American religions, various New Age groups, and even atheists. Your Earliteen Sabbath School class has been asked to produce a display highlighting Seventh-day Adventism.

Divide the class into small groups (unless your class includes five people or less, in which case you may want to do this all together) to discuss what your presentation would consist of. What would you show and do? What would be the best way to highlight your religion in a way that would make it seem attractive to others? After allowing a few minutes for groups to plan what they would present, have them come back and share with the whole group.

Debriefing • Ask: Why did you choose the

kind of presentation you did? What do you think it would tell others about the Seventh-day Adventist Church? Are there elements of our church or our beliefs that you wouldn't want to present at a program like this? If so, why not? Would you be comfortable going around and viewing the presentations by other groups in this "Diversity Day" program? Why or why not? Were there any members in your group who felt it would be better not to enter the "Diversity Day" program at all? If so, why did they feel that way?

B. APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. If we want the freedom to worship the way we choose, does that mean everyone else should have the same freedom? Why or why not? How do you feel about that?
2. How do you usually handle discussions about religion with friends who believe differently?
3. How would you approach someone who believed that any attempt to share your faith was intolerant and that Christians should keep their religion to themselves?
4. Are you comfortable learning about other people's religious beliefs—e.g. visiting other houses of worship, reading their sacred books, going to religious and cultural festivals or events? Do you think it's

OK to do this, or is it dangerous to find out too much about other beliefs?

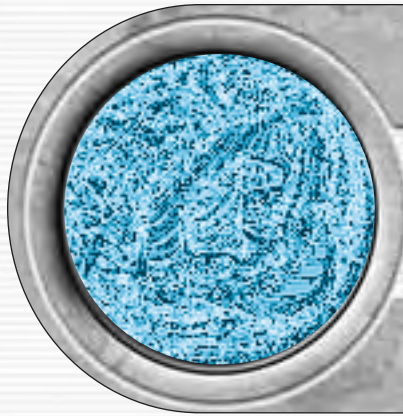
5. Do you feel that people in general are tolerant of your Christian beliefs? Have you ever felt discriminated against or as if you don't fit in because of your faith? How did you handle it?

6 CLOSING

SUMMARY

In your own words, conclude with the following ideas:

We live in a complex world where new ideas and new religions are sprouting up daily. As people move around more and learn more about other cultures through the media, we're all getting exposed to new and different ideas. We have so many opportunities to meet the world of people with whom Jesus told us to share the gospel. But sharing our beliefs can be seen as narrow-minded and intolerant. We have to walk a fine line between respecting the beliefs of others and holding firmly to our own. Loving people as Jesus did is the ultimate key. Preaching can be seen as intolerant; love never is. Let God's love shine out from you to everyone, no matter how different they may be.



STUDENT LESSON

LIVING IN THE HERE AND NOW: TOLERANCE

Liberty for All?

March 26, 2011

>>KEY TEXT: Choose one of the texts from Wednesday's portion of the lesson. Write it here and memorize it this week.



LIBERTY FOR ALL?

(What connection do you think the following illustration has with the Bible texts on the other page?)

India Tracy was a straight-A high school student in Tennessee, U.S.A. Her family was Pagan—they practiced a modern version of an ancient nature-worshiping religion. India got in trouble with teachers and administration at her public school for refusing to attend a Christian tent revival that was held during school hours and for refusing to play Mary in a school Christmas play. When India wrote a class paper on religious freedom, a teacher told her to “keep quiet or you’ll get in trouble.” Other students beat her up and picked on her, including three boys who chased her down the hall, grabbed her by the back of the neck, and told her to “change your religion or we’ll change it for you.” She was called a “Satan-worshiper,” a lesbian, and accused of eating babies, because she wasn’t a Christian.

Meanwhile, in the African country of Eritrea,

60 teenagers who were required to attend a military training camp were arrested when military commanders searched their belongings and discovered they were carrying Bibles. The students were punished by being placed in metal shipping containers with no light, extreme heat, and limited air and food.

Discrimination against people because of their religious beliefs can be minor, serious, or even life-threatening. It can happen across the world or here at home. It can happen to people who believe in the same things we do, or people we totally disagree with.

“Tolerance” is an important word in society today. How can we be tolerant of other people’s beliefs if we disagree with them? Do pagan teenagers like India Tracy deserve the same religious freedom that we want for ourselves and our fellow Christians in Eritrea?



Sunday

HERE'S WHAT I THINK

Christians want the freedom to pray, talk about their religion, and worship God openly. Meanwhile, non-Christians want the freedom to talk openly about their religion and not have Christianity “pushed” on them. Read the stories of India Tracy and the Eritrean students in the illustration “Liberty for All?” What is similar about all the characters in the stories? Does tolerance mean accepting everyone’s beliefs, even if they’re different from yours? If you tell a non-Christian about Jesus, are you being intolerant? Where do we draw the line?



Monday

WHAT ARE THEY TRYING TO SAY?

Different people, different opinions. Some of the quotations below represent the views of true kingdom citizens; others may not. Can you tell the difference? How do these statements compare with what God is saying in His Word? After reviewing the texts in the **God Says . . .** portion of the lesson, write a statement that captures your belief. Be prepared to quote yourself at Sabbath School.

>>“There is a sense in which the world needs broad-mindedness and tolerance; and certainly we all need understanding and charity. However, in the realm of intolerance we are too broad-minded in certain areas. In some things Christ was the most tolerant, broad-minded Man that ever lived, but in other things He was one of the most intolerant of men.”—Billy Graham, current U.S. evangelist.

>>“Perhaps it’s the greatest of all human vanities to assume that one’s religion is the only way to Deity.”—Scott Cunningham, current U.S. Wiccan writer.

>>“Just as many rivers lead to the sea, there are many paths to God.”—Joan Borysenko, current U.S. writer.

>>“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”
—Jesus (John 14:6, NIV).

>>“Persecution was at least a sign of personal interest. Tolerance is composed of nine parts of apathy to one of brotherly love.”—Frank Moore Colby, 19th-century U.S. editor and writer.

>>“Of all religions, Christianity is without a doubt the one that should inspire tolerance most, although, up to now, the Christians have been the most intolerant of all men.”—François Marie Arouet Voltaire, 18th-century French philosopher and writer.

Write your own quotation.
WHAT I SAY IS . . .



Tuesday

SO WHAT?

As we noted in last week’s lesson, we’re surrounded by more different beliefs and attitudes today than ever before. Most people no longer accept “Because the Bible says so” as a good enough answer. How does a Christian young person respond to the “rainbow” of different religious beliefs in the world around us? Is it our job to convince others that we’re right? Do we simply “agree to disagree”? Can we show tolerance and respect for people’s beliefs and share Jesus with them at the same time?

Tough questions. Even experienced Christian adults still struggle with these things. It’s not easy to strike the perfect balance between respecting other people’s beliefs and standing firmly on your own. As God’s kingdom agents in this world, how do we infiltrate society without offending people, turning them off, or being disrespectful? We have a fine line to walk. Jesus calls us to be fearless and bold in standing for Him, yet to always treat others the way we would want to be treated. That means respecting other people’s right to their beliefs just as we want our own rights to be respected.



Wednesday

GOD SAYS . . .

>>**Acts 4:12 (CEV)**

“Only Jesus has the power to save! His name is the only one in all the world that can save anyone.”

>>**John 14:6 (CEV)**

“‘I am the way, the truth, and the life!’ Jesus answered. ‘Without me, no one can go to the Father.’”

>>**Romans 12:18 (CEV)**

“Do your best to live at peace with everyone.”

>>Matthew 28:19, 20 (CEV)

"Go to the people of all nations and make them my disciples. Baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to do everything I have told you. I will be with you always, even until the end of the world."

>>1 Peter 2:12 (NIV)

"Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us."

>>Ephesians 4:4-6 (CEV)

"All of you are part of the same body. There is only one Spirit of God, just as you were given one hope when you were chosen to be God's people. We have only one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. There is one God who is the Father of all people."

>>John 17:13-18 (CEV)

"I say these things while I am still in the world, so that my followers will have the same complete joy that I do. I have told them your message. But the people of this world hate them, because they don't belong to this world, just as I don't. Father, I don't ask you to take my followers out of the world, but keep them safe from the evil one. They don't belong to this world, and neither do I. . . . I am sending them into the world, just as you sent me."



Thursday

**WHAT DOES THIS
HAVE TO DO WITH ME?**

If you've had any contact at all with non-Christians (or even with other Christians outside your own church) then you know that some people think that it's very narrow-minded and intolerant to believe you have "the truth" about God and about how we should live. But for Seventh-

day Adventists, "The Truth" has always been an important way of expressing what we believe.

In a world that says "there are many different truths for different people," can you believe in "The Truth" anymore? Seventh-day Adventist Christians say Yes! But in a world with more diversity, more different views and opinions than ever before, we have to think carefully about how to share that Truth.

Forcing your views on people never works. Most of the time it only makes them angry and hostile towards what you're trying to say. Shutting people down and saying they don't have a right to their own beliefs is unfair and un-Christlike. While we have to stand firm on what we believe, we also have to respect and love others whose beliefs are different.

In fact, love is the key here. Bible doctrines have their place, but the best way to share Jesus in the world we live in today is to live His love in everything we do. When people see our love in action, they'll be ready to hear our message of God's love.



Friday

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Interview three to five friends whom you know have a different religious background or outlook than you do. Ask them:

- Do you believe in a God?
- If so, what do you think God is like?
- What do you think happens to people after they die?
- How should people decide what's right or wrong to do?
- What's the ultimate point of life?

Make notes of their answers. Then, look back over their answers and think about how their views differ from yours. What could you say about your belief in Jesus that would be meaningful to each of these people? Pray for your friends and ask God to touch their lives in a way that they can relate to.

